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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the role of successful teachers of students of color within a restructuring educational environment. It describes three successful teachers of African-American students in two restructuring schools, discusses ways in which their practices and outlooks supported the success of otherwise low-achieving students, and describes how they diverged from their schools' norms. The paper analyzes why, despite their exemplary practice, each of these African American teachers, for different reasons, had limited influence on his/her school's reform agendas. Finally, some implications are suggested for school restructuring in general. The paper's central argument is that the pedagogical knowledge, exemplary practices, and perspectives of successful teachers of students of color are resources for school change and that these resources must be recognized, legitimized, and supported as a significant component of transforming schools for all children. Based on observations made at two biracial (black and white) junior high schools, it is argued that reforms may have to address broader relations of power and dominant ideologies if these teachers and parents and communities of color are to be heard and that ways must be found to sponsor effective teachers and to ensure that these teachers have a significant voice in conversations about school change. (Contains 50 references.) (GLR)

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"BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN THEM"

The Voice of Culturally Relevant Teachers in School Restructuring

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Research for Better Schools

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"BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN THEM"

The Voice of Culturally Relevant Teachers in School Restructuring

"Even though I'm not doing the Mentoring and Counseling Program any more, I can't reject them. They know I care about them. They know when you're not pretending. You don't turn off realness."--Paulette

"I find them where they are. I say, 'You've told stories. When you say, "The way I see it," that's point of view.' I just do it like that. When kids believe you think they can learn, they will."--Samuel

"We have to challenge these students. When we don't give them an opportunity, we're taking something away from them."--Helen

The compelling idea that schools must be fundamentally restructured has given birth to countless national and local efforts. As changes in organization, governance, teachers' worklife, curriculum, instruction, and assessment have begun to unfold, the central question is: Will they make a real difference in students' experiences in school? Will they result in significant changes in teaching and learning and social relations? And, in particular, will restructuring make a real difference for children of color, who will become 40% of the school population by the year 2000, and whom our schools are most failing?

In this paper, I address one aspect of this question--the role of successful teachers of students of color in school restructuring. The paper describes three successful teachers of African American students in two restructuring schools. I discuss ways in which their practice and outlook supported the success of otherwise low-achieving students and how they diverged from their schools' norms. I briefly analyze why, despite their exemplary practice, each of these teachers, for different reasons, had limited influence on her/his school's reform agendas. Finally, I suggest some implications for school restructuring in general.

My central argument is that the pedagogical knowledge, exemplary practices, and perspectives of successful teachers of students of color are resources for school change--and that these resources must be recognized, legitimated, and supported as a significant component of transforming schools for all children. I argue that these exemplary teachers are a bridge between what is, and what might be, in restructuring schools with culturally and racially diverse student populations. However, the marginal influence of these teachers indicates that new opportunities for professional dialogue, collaboration, and initiative will not necessarily ensure that the perspectives of exemplary teachers of African American and other marginalized groups will be heard. The results of this study also suggests that reforms may have to address broader relations of power and dominant ideologies if these teachers and parents and communities of color are to be heard.

The Context: Two Restructuring Schools

This paper is part of a larger, ethnographic study (Lipman, 1993) of two junior high schools beginning to restructure. The larger study explored the influence of organizational restructuring, teacher collaboration, and teacher empowerment on teachers' beliefs about and practices with low-achieving African American students. The research was conducted in two integrated, bi-racial (African American and white) schools, which I call *Gates* and *Franklin*, located in *Riverton*,[1] a Southern school district with a history of conflict over desegregation. Using ethnographic methods, I conducted repeated, formal and informal, open-ended interviews of teachers, students, administrators at all levels of the school system, and community leaders; I observed classes, school activities, and school and district meetings; and I collected relevant documents. This research was done over a three year period, but I

collected the majority of the data in the third year (1990-91), the first year of "whole school restructuring" in Riverton.

A recurring theme in current education reform literature is the need for educators to develop new shared meanings, values, and assumptions (Lieberman, 1988; Lieberman, Darling-Hammond, & Zuckerman, 1991; Fullan, 1982; Sarason, 1982; Sirotnik, 1987; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1992). Following this line of reasoning, I assumed that critical inquiry about beliefs, values, routine practices, and procedures is an important aspect of cultural change in schools (cf. Hopfenberg, 1990; Lieberman, Darling-Hammond, & Zuckerman, 1991; Sirotnik, 1987). I looked for evidence that educators had begun to scrutinize and re-evaluate the daily regularities of life in their schools, especially as these regularities affected the educational experiences of African American students. Particularly in the early stages of restructuring, I was interested in learning if organizational changes which supported teacher collaboration and professional dialogue fostered conversation on topics germane to the educational experiences of African Americans, under what conditions, and what the obstacles might be. I also examined the relationship of expanded teacher roles ("teacher empowerment") and the initiatives teachers took to improve the education of low-achieving African American students. Although I focussed on teachers, I explored the social and political context of the schools and community within which they worked as this context seemed to influence their beliefs about and practices with African American students.

The Two Schools

Gates Junior High School was the premier junior high in Riverton. Its attendance zone matched the two wealthiest, primarily white areas of the city with one of the poorest

African American sections. About 40% of the students were white, most of whom lived in two affluent neighborhoods bordering the school, and about 60% were African American, most of whom were bused-in from a low-income neighborhood across the city. Over all at Gates, African American students scored dramatically below their white peers on standardized achievement measures and received a disproportionate share of the school's disciplinary actions. There were just eight African American teachers in a faculty of 49, the lowest percentage of any junior high in the district. The powerbase at Gates was securely lodged with the school's affluent white parents. These parents were very active and visible, individually and through their domination of Gates' PTO. The PTO raised thousands of dollars each year for the school, intervened aggressively in matters concerning their children, and were very influential, not only with the principal but with the board of education and school district leaders. The principal was a white male with political clout in the district. Gates' overwhelmingly white, experienced faculty generally identified with the school's college preparatory, honors track curriculum, and the behaviors, norms, and culture of academic success which were congruent with middle and upper middle class white students. African American students were largely invisible in the school's curriculum, behavioral norms, traditions, and valued activities. And African American families seemed only to come to the school when summoned by an administrator, usually for a disciplinary problem involving their children.

In contrast, the other school, which I call *Franklin*, was 80% African American, 20% white, and uniformly working class or low-income. Although African Americans were not a marginal group, as at Gates, the school itself was often identified by educators in the district

as "low-achieving" or "all at-risk". It was near the bottom of junior high schools on standard achievement measures and had one of the highest suspension rates. The faculty was equally composed of white and African American teachers--the highest percentage of African American teachers of any junior high in the district--and was fragmented into multiple overlapping and conflicting subgroups along lines of race, longevity at the school, and core subjects vs. related arts. Franklin was led by a young African American woman. As a new principal, she had little influence with district leaders, and Franklin parents had little influence in the district.

Gates and Franklin were very different schools, yet there were several significant similarities with important implications for African American students and for the course of restructuring. One, despite significant achievement gaps between African American and white students, there was a pervasive culture of silence about race. The taboo against discussing racial issues was supported by teachers' frequent insistence that they "didn't see color" (cf. Schofield, 1982) and by a tenuous veneer of racial harmony among the faculty at Gates (cf. Clement, Eisenhart, & Harding, 1979).[2] Two, many teachers articulated a deficit model of "at-risk" students.[3] Especially at Gates, but also at Franklin, this was acted out in low behavioral and academic expectations for many African American students, and in attempts to counsel and otherwise "fix" students and their families. Three, many teachers believed that improving social relations between students and adults and creating a stronger sense of school membership would improve academic performance and students' commitment to school, especially for "at-risk" students. This led them to focus one-sidedly on affective and social domains of schooling. Neither deficit nor social relations perspectives brought into

question prevailing curricula, pedagogies, and school policies, nor the marginal position of African American students. Only a few educators at either school articulated a critique of the educational system or an analysis of the racial dynamics in their school. In addition there were a number of practices and policies with negative consequences for African Americans: academic tracking which was more pervasive at Gates where African American students were disproportionately assigned to low track classes; typically, low expectations and a dumbed down curriculum for "regular track students" at both schools; a punitive climate and the disproportionate disciplining of African Americans; Eurocentric curricula and disconnection from African American students' culture and experiences, particularly at Gates. (These are described more fully in the larger study (Lipman, 1993).

The Restructuring Agenda and Its Assumptions

The focus of restructuring in Riverton was on changes in school organization, teachers' roles and relationships ("empowerment" and collaboration), and on increasing teachers' knowledge base.[4] A primary goal of restructuring was to improve the educational experiences, achievement, attendance, and commitment to school of students identified as "at-risk", most of whom were African American. (In fact, the "at-risk" label was often a proxy for low-achieving African Americans.) A building-level steering committee of teachers, administrators, and other professional staff was formed to make some policy decisions and to resolve problems. The schools were broken up into grade-level interdisciplinary teams of teachers responsible for a common group of students. Each team had two planning periods a day and flexible scheduling of classes. This created an opportunity for on-going collaboration among small groups of teachers. Team meetings provided a context for teachers to share

ideas about individual students, existing practice, and educational goals as well as to initiate new activities and curricula. The expectation was that when teachers came together, influenced each other's thinking, and used their expanded authority, they would devise educational changes that would ultimately result in improved educational outcomes for students, particularly those "at risk". School people at all levels, including teachers, also expected that creating smaller units or clusters of teachers and students would personalize adult/student relationships and increase students' sense of school membership.

These expectations were consistent with an underlying assumption of many restructuring efforts that decentralization of schools, professional collaboration, and teacher empowerment with focused staff development will lead to improvements in teaching and learning and school climate. There are several plausible arguments for this assumption. (1) Empowering teachers will enable them to exercise initiative and creativity to improve educational practice and school policy (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988; Hawley, 1985; Holmes, 1986; Kanter, 1983; Schlechty, 1990; Schlechty, Ingwerson, & Brooks, 1988; Schlechty & Joslin, 1986; Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986). (2) A second set of assumptions centers on the theoretical link between professional collaboration and educational improvement. It is argued that educators' professional isolation is individually debilitating and stifles constructive dialogue (Freedman, Jackson, & Boles 1983; Rosenholtz, 1989; Schlechty, 1990; Sizer, 1984). Teacher collaboration is expected to promote dialogues of change (Hopfenberg, 1991; Sizer, 1984). Particularly within multiracial teaching staffs, collaboration might be expected to prompt reflection on practices and policies that marginalize students of color. (3) The anonymity endemic to large, impersonal schools is

thought to contribute to students' alienation and lack of a sense of membership in the school (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko & Fernandez, 1989). It is posited that sub-dividing schools into smaller, more collective and supportive learning environments will help strengthen understanding, trust, and a sense of reciprocal legitimacy between students and their teachers (Lipsitz, 1984; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1988; Ratzki & Fisher, 1989/90; Sizer, 1984). The thrust of these arguments was echoed by teachers and school leaders in this study.

Three Exemplary Teachers of African American Students

Both Gates and Franklin had a poor track record in educating African American students. Yet, at both schools there were teachers who were highly successful with these students. Their practices, beliefs about students, and educational visions were sharply divergent from most of their colleagues. Three teachers--Paulette Washington at Gates and Samuel Thompson and Helen McAllister at Franklin--are illustrative of this group.[5]

Paulette Washington

Paulette Washington was one of nine African American teachers at Gates. A reading teacher for five years, in 1990-91 she was assigned to teach a new, heterogeneously grouped, Study and Research Methods class introduced as part of restructuring. Paulette was often mentioned by her colleagues as particularly successful with low-achieving students, and she had a rapport with students whom other teachers labelled trouble makers. Paulette taught in one half of a classroom, separated by a room divider from a computer lab. Crammed but organized, her room was filled with literature and writing. Within this space, Paulette frequently reorganized the desks to accommodate simultaneous cooperative activities.

Frequently, students who were strong in particular skills helped others who were weaker. Typically, students in her classes were attentive and serious, and there was a thoughtfulness and respectfulness toward each other which was often missing in other classes at Gates.

Paulette was a strong advocate for African American students. They sought her out because she was one of the few adults who grasped their alienation at Gates. Caring and mentorship were embodied in her relationships with students outside the classroom as well as in class. She said:

> Last year I did MCP [Mentoring and Counseling Program]. I did lots of things with them, took kids bowling, things like that. My husband even had the boys overnight. Some of my same MCP kids still cling to me. They come by and say, "Won't you still counsel me, Miss Washington?" "I'll counsel you," I say, and pat them on the shoulder (laugh). But they come up to me in the halls. Even though I'm not doing MCP any more. I can't reject them. They know I care about them. They know when you're not pretending. You don't turn off realness.

However, she had little power to influence the overall fate of African American youth at Gates. To Paulette, there was a clear connection between the marginal location of African American faculty, including herself, and the subordination of African American students. Paulette:

> There are no Black role models for these kids. I've been at Gates for six years, and during that time they've lost three or four black teachers. I'm coordinating a Black history project right now. There's a teacher who will not let a kid in the room a couple minutes late because he has to come from the auditorium where we are rehearsing. Every day it's the same thing. I think he's doing it on purpose to this kid just to harass him, and there's not much I can do.

Nevertheless, she did what she could. She initiated *AfroNotions* (an African American cultural club at Gates), was active in a district multicultural curriculum project, and informally tutored and mentored students outside of class.

Unlike some of her team colleagues who emphasized nurturing for low-achieving students and academics for high achievers, Paulette expected all her students to perform academically and to conduct themselves appropriately. Above all, Paulette said, she was "about learning". She explained her philosophy: "At first kids give you a hard time, but when they see that you're solid, they're okay. When they see that you're serious about learning, they're okay." She believed that the alienation and poor academic performance of many Black students at Gates was due to teachers' low expectations and inability to recognize their strengths. "These kids are intelligent. They know the material. They have good memories. They can remember a 20 minute rap song, but they don't have school skills. They aren't subject-wise."

One thing that set Paulette apart from many teachers at Gates was that she saw strengths in students where others saw only deficits. This was illustrated by her perceptions of Raymond, an African American ninth grader who had been retained, was doing poorly academically, and was frequently disciplined by administrators. In his classes, I observed him to be bored; he alternately acted out or was sullen and withdrawn. Only in Paulette's class did he demonstrate a measure of academic engagement. Other teachers on Paulette's team characterized Raymond as "very low", "probably a gang banger", and "your typical at-risk kid". They were negative about his behavior and thought him to be very deficient in reading and math. Teacher:

> He can't keep a piece of paper from one day to the next. He doesn't listen. He can't read. He's a zero. I think he has a hearing disability because he never seems to hear what I say. But as far as mental processes he's not special [mentally disabled]. But he's just not there.

Paulette's view of Raymond was sharply at odds with her team mates' pessimistic appraisal:

> Raymond *can* read. He tested average in reading. And he's good in math. If they say he can't read they haven't checked with the reading teachers. That's just superficial. They haven't really gone into it. He has a lot of strength, a lot of strength. He's a *good* listener. He likes strokes, immediate feedback. Not long term rewards but immediate. He's a good conversationalist. But they don't see that. He's totally turned off to school.

This was a clear instance in which teachers did not utilize opportunities of collaboration to learn from Paulette's success with a student they were failing. I return to this issue below.

Samuel Thompson

Samuel Thompson, an African American teacher in his forties, was widely recognized by his colleagues to be creative, challenging and popular with students. A literature teacher and writer, his teaching and everyday conversation were imbued with flair and drama. His classes were experiential and student-directed, yet he was at the center, like a dramatic concert master, spurring students on, correcting, applauding. He was also extremely outspoken. It was not unusual for him to stop, on his way through the school office, to inquire about the situation of a student waiting to see the principal and then offer some advice to both the student and her/his parent.

Samuel's classroom was decorated with book posters, samples of student writing, the vocabulary words for the week, student projects, and several prominently displayed posters of African American leaders and authors. Rows of text books were in perfect order on the shelves, and there was a broad assortment of paperback novels, poetry anthologies, and plays. There were several plants, and in front of the door was a small, clean, braided rug on which all who entered were expected to wipe their feet. Several times each day, Samuel could be seen sweeping his room and the hallway outside his classroom door. Although some teachers smiled at this eccentricity, Samuel went right on, explaining that "keeping up" his room was

a way of engendering respect for what occurred there. "Our classroom is our home," he said, projecting the sense of family that he created within this space.

In part, he accomplished this simply by treating the room as a home--sweeping it out, putting a rug in front of the doorway, cleaning it himself. Also students had a stake in this space, a sense of ownership that was visible. Before and after school and during lunch period they met there to rehearse a play, complete an assignment, or plan a project. Sometimes Samuel was available as informal advisor, sometimes not. Students were in charge of room decor, on their own initiative answered knocks at the door, and freely used materials out of Samuel's resource files for projects and papers. In many small ways, he conveyed a sense of trust and respect which students clearly returned in their interactions with him and among themselves while they were in his room. As with Paulette, students who were reputed to be troublemakers and whom I observed to be disrespectful of adults and their peers in other classes, conducted themselves with maturity in Samuel's classes.

Because of the rapport and mutual respect he established with students, he rarely encountered the discipline problems so many teachers complained about. "I never send students to the office. That's not necessary here," he claimed. Also his teaching was responsive to the vitality of young adolescents and was in sharp contrast with the punitive climate in many Franklin classrooms. Samuel:

> I encourage my students to express themselves. At the proper moment of course. But for some teachers that may be a discipline problem. But you have to give them an opportunity to express their creativity. You can't be so rigid.

Samuel exuded confidence and commitment toward Franklin students. For him, working at Franklin was a calling:

> If you preach negativism, that's what you get. I call them segmental children. Segmental. Teachers have a stigma about these children and so they do about enough to keep them in their seat and away from their desk. They don't spend enough time to find, to see where the deficiencies can be corrected. Of course we have children with deficiencies. We're a feeder school. You understand what I mean. Some schools won't take these children. But we don't feel that way toward these children. We believe every child can learn.

He was outspokenly opposed to the incentives some teachers had begun using because he believed they demonstrated a fundamental lack of confidence in students. He criticized teachers who said, "You behave and I'll let you do my bulletin board":

> I hate that! Bribing children that way instead of bringing out the best in them. A student is in charge of room decorum in my room. He designs all the bulletin boards. When I say I want to change the board, Arthur stands back and looks at it. "Oh no. I had a very different idea," he says. So that 's the way it is. I believe in giving the children a lot of autonomy. They're responsible for their own learning. I tell them what they'll learn but they suggest how.

Helen McAllister

Helen McAllister was a gracious and dignified woman who had made her 30-plus years of teaching into a life purpose. She was one of the most highly respected teachers at Franklin. Students and parents--white and Black--requested, even demanded, they have her for a teacher. She was a recognized teacher-leader who headed one of the new grade-level teams, sponsored the student honor society, and chaired the English department. Her room, appealingly decorated with student work and literary posters, was impeccably ordered and somehow less dingy than many at Franklin. It projected some of the most salient aspects of Helen's teaching: she was highly structured yet creative, respectful, celebratory of student accomplishments, and above all, serious about learning.

Students understood that "you worked in Ms. McAllister's room." Her sense of

responsibility and commitment to students elicited the same qualities in return. Although she was very positive about the collegial aspects of restructuring, as well as about team activities, her concern was that restructuring result in stronger academic performance for low-achieving students and a reduction of the racial disparities, "They like the rewards, the pizza parties, the motivational speakers. But I want students to compete academically." The theme of "not limiting the students" ran through her teaching and her discourse about teaching. "I think it's important to expose ninth graders to as much as possible," she said. Contending that achievement disparities were partly the result of low expectations for African American students, she taught regular track students the same as honors students.

> I have high expectations for all of my students. I don't water down anything for them. If some need extra help, I work with them individually....I'm frustrated that we can't teach high school books. We can't teach any books from the high school list in junior high school. So this holds a lot of junior high school students back. We have to challenge these students. When we don't give them an opportunity, we're taking something away from them.

She projected confidence that students could meet the standards she set and then provided concrete support in meeting them. She worked with students individually and tutored them outside school hours. At the beginning of the year she gave them their standardized test scores and mapped out a plan with them for improvement. In the spring she told them she would be preparing work for them to do over the summer as well as lists of books they should read to prepare them for high school and, "to keep your minds active."

In Helen's classes, doing well academically was normatively valued. Conversations about choosing a high school, planning for college, and preparing for college entrance tests were woven into academics. Discipline was a non-issue. She declared, "In all my years of teaching, I sent two students to the office." With patience and humanity she held attentive

and respectful students to uniformly high standards of academic performance and behavior. The most unruly students in other classes did not act up in Ms. McAllister's room. Boisterous adolescents, considered by other teachers as too tough to handle, gathered their composure as they entered with a respectful, "Good afternoon, Miz McAllister." They sat down, took out their work, and bent themselves to her challenges. Almost without exception students in her classes exhibited a seriousness about learning and a respectfulness toward each other that contrasted sharply with many other classes at Franklin. One of these students told me simply, "The kids don't want to disappoint Miss McAllister."

Helen was convinced that children would learn if there was a relationship based on trust and concern, like family. For her, learning was grounded in the quality of these relationships. She visited students' homes, knew them from church, talked with them outside class, and invited parents to sit in on classes. Families were listened to and their ideas valued. In several team meetings, she reported proposals parents had made for their children's learning or strategies she and the parents had jointly constructed.

Educated in Black schools and an historically Black college, she continued the tradition of teaching as a calling, a community responsibility akin to a clergy-person or a community leader (cf. Siddle Walker, 1993). In addition to volunteering in early morning and after school tutoring programs, she worked with students during her lunch hour. Two evenings a week she volunteered in a community tutoring program. She taught Sunday school in her church and was organizing and teaching in a Saturday school on Black history and culture run by churches in the African American community. Although she did not phrase it this way, teaching for Helen was fulfilling a responsibility to help raise the next

generation to its fullest potential. As an African American teacher, she considered herself responsible to compensate for the injustices African American students experienced in school:

> Black students don't know their history and they never see their own culture in school. That is why they act out, because they've been put down. Some people want to get away from February as Black history month. It's been used as a stigma. Black history needs to be taught all the way through. They are not aware of their own history. They don't know Carver, or DuBois, or Bethune. The churches are beginning to take responsibility for teaching this history because the schools aren't doing it. We want them to feel good about themselves and develop high self-esteem.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The pedagogy[6] of these teachers fits within the theoretical framework of a developing literature on culturally relevant teachers of African American students. (See, for example, the special issue of *Theory Into Practice*, on "Literacy and the African American Learner," Gadsden, 1992; and the *Journal of Education* on "African Liberation Pedagogy," King, 1990; see also Delpit, 1992b; Foster, 1991; 1994; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1990a; 1990b; 1991; 1992a; 1992b; Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1990). Ladson-Billings (1990a) argues that "the real difference" between successful teachers of African American students and those who fail with Black students "is that [successful teachers] are engaged in...culturally relevant teaching. It is the kind of teaching that uses the students' culture to help them achieve success."[7] This kind of teaching "...allows black students to "choose" academic excellence without losing a sense of personal and cultural identity" (Ladson-Billings, 1990b: 337).

Successful African American teachers described by Foster (1991; 1994) hold students to stringent standards of behavior and "at the same time they give students unconditional support to achieve academic success by actively engaging them in learning and challenging them...to critical thinking" (1991: 298). They develop relationships with students that extend

beyond the classroom--"reference to family and community experiences and values undergird classroom pedagogy...." (1991: 301).[8] Their teaching is not only congruent with students' cultural backgrounds, but has a socio-political dimension as well. It is liberatory, "designed to foster education that empowers and enables" (Ladson-Billings, 1990b: 399), individually and collectively.

Despite different instructional methods, Paulette, Samuel, and Helen shared common commitments, values, expectations for their students, and connections with families and community. Instead of deficit models or paternalistic, second-class standards of success prevalent in their schools, they had confidence in students, recognized their strengths, and--as Samuel put it--brought "out the best in them." What is most important here, they succeeded where others often failed. Their teaching was characterized by:

- High standards for behavior and academic achievement and the commitment to help students meet standards
- Caring and respectful relationships with students
- Values-based teaching and concern with the development of the whole person
- Valuing students' cultural background and experiences and using student's knowledge as a bridge to classroom knowledge.
- Relationships that transcend the classroom and extend to family and community
- Seeing teaching as a calling, a responsibility to students' families and communities
- Advocacy for African American and other marginalized students

Although all three expressed cultural solidarity with African American students (Foster, 1994), they deliberately taught "the codes of power" to children who did not have access to them (Delpit (1992a; 1988). Samuel explicitly taught "what educated people" say,

yet made his room into a studio for students' own cultural productions, directed African American history plays, and affirmed the knowledge acquired through their own experiences. Helen prepared students for college entrance tests, introduced them to the best high schools, and gave them work over the summer in standard English grammar. At the same time, she advocated for a curriculum that embodied African American culture. Paulette coached students to be "subject wise," explicitly teaching rules and procedures of academic discourse that many low-achieving students hadn't been exposed to (cf. Delpit, 1988). At the same time, she initiated African American cultural activities and connected classroom knowledge with students' experiences. Samuel concretely reinforced students' confidence in their own knowledge and the worth of their own life experience by helping students translate what they knew into academic knowledge:

> [I tell my students] "You can do this because you already know this." Then I go into the heart of the matter. Sometimes I turn on the soaps. I say, "Today we're going to watch the soaps." "The soaps?" they say. They can't believe it. But we do. Then we talk about it. We go from the soaps and then I tell them what educated people call this and that. I ask them who is telling the story. They know that. Then I tell them, "You already know point of view. You just described it." We do the same thing with character and plot. I find them where they are. I say, "You've told stories. When you say, 'The way I see it,' that's point of view." I just do it like that. When kids believe you think they can learn, they will. If they know you're sincere.

In these ways, all three helped African American students "choose academic success in the face of competing pressures" (Ladson-Billings, 1992b: 313) and without sacrificing their cultural identity or loyalty to their group (cf. Fordham, 1988).

They held high standards for academic performance and then tried to find ways for children to meet them. Unlike teachers who saw low-achieving African American students as deficient, these exemplary teachers gave them access to classroom knowledge by tapping into

their own experiences and culture. (See Ladson-Billings, 1991: 237 for the culturally relevant notion of "pulling knowledge out" rather than what she calls the "assimilationist" approach of "putting knowledge into" students.) They built bridges between prior knowledge and new content. (See Foster, 1992a; Murrell, 1991, for similar analyses). Their classes built on the experiences students brought into the classroom. Paulette taught reading through assisting students to read the driver's test manual, write letters to government agencies and employers for family and community members who needed help, read tax manuals, and complete family income tax forms. She had the cultural knowledge to draw on students' experiences and was critical of other teachers whose classes had little meaning for most students. She claimed, "...They don't relate what they're teaching to what the kids already know. What's in their own experience....They don't understand their culture. They don't start with what the kids are equipped with."

Murrell (1991) argues that, for pre-service teachers of color, the expert teacher is one for whom human relationships are central to the learning process, one who displays a "connectedness with students." For Paulette, Samuel, and Helen, teaching was based on relationships akin to family. They expressed a holistic concern for the young people in their charge and adopted parenting or mentoring roles with them. It was the sort of relationship captured in Paulette's term "realness". This was qualitatively different from teachers at Gates who had high standards but adopted an impersonal, drill sergeant approach to students. And it was also qualitatively different from the nurturing by Gates' teachers, and even by African American teachers at Franklin, both of whom emphasized social relations disconnected from strategies and expectations for academic success.

Although all three regretted the erosion of Black community and family cohesiveness which had been a mainstay in their own development, they did not view families as hindrances, nor use family problems as an excuse for not teaching. They wanted to work with families, not substitute for them as did some Gates' teachers with a "messiah complex" (Delpit, 1992b). Teaching for them was a calling, demonstrating their sense of responsibility not only to the children and their families, but to the community (cf. Ladson-Billings, 1990b).

As distinct from the paradigm of individual success (as in honors classes at Gates), culturally relevant pedagogy is teaching toward collective empowerment (cf. Cummins, 1986; Foster, 1994; King, 1991). The goal is to help students develop critical consciousness and to work for social change. Although the teachers in this study did not explicitly describe their work in these terms, they made their subject matter a basis for examining personal and social values. To varying degrees, all three chose content that affirmed African American culture and history and the struggle for social justice. They also encouraged community and cooperation in their classes. Both Samuel and Paulette were advocates for African American students and organized activities that affirmed African American culture in their schools. Helen extended this role into her community activities. In these ways, they were "not merely teaching for individual success, but teaching for survival of the person, the family, the community, and the people" (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990: 82). They were educating children to think critically and preparing them to play a transformative role in their communities and the broader society (cf. King, 1994).

The Marginalization of Exemplary Teachers of African American Students

Theoretically, restructuring gave the teachers described here a fresh opportunity to share their insights and practices with their colleagues and to influence how other teachers viewed and related to students labelled "at risk". In fact, each of them seized the opportunity to make change. And each of them had a more far-reaching vision of change than most of their colleagues.

Paulette described herself as a teacher who used to just "do her job" but was revitalized by the opportunity of restructuring. She not only envisioned radical change in Gate's highly traditional curriculum and instruction, but took a lot of individual initiative to explore alternatives. There was probably no other teacher at Gates who had so actively sought out curricular and instructional alternatives as Paulette had. She was involved in a district project to design multicultural curricula, contending, "We have a black history month, but it needs to be the whole year as a part of the curriculum." As part of this project, she visited an innovative school in another part of the state. Her purpose was to investigate alternative examples of restructured schools. She returned very excited. The district was all white and rural, but she felt that their ideas were applicable to Gates. She described one of the classes she had observed:

> You could tell those kids loved to come to school. You can feel a cheerfulness. It's almost like a song. None of this, "Line up the seats, we're on page three"....They took Julius Caesar and rewrote it and developed their own situation. We could do that here. At [Gates] we focus too much on extracurricular activities [incentives, parties]. But you would be amazed at the outcome when you have the freedom.

Like Paulette, Samuel's practice and educational philosophy potentially set a direction for educational reform at Franklin. His room was filled with the products of experiential

learning--a rarity in most Franklin classrooms, and his closet was stocked with ingenious games using vocabulary words, literary terms, literature, and writing. These, he was quick to point out, were created each year by "regular students, not honors, regular." He envisioned restructuring as a vehicle to transform curriculum. He talked about this in relation to his dream for a truly professional school newspaper that would be the product of a multi-grade, interdisciplinary class:

> I'd like to have it be multi-grade so the ninth graders could teach the eighth graders. That way students could apprentice with other students, teach each other. But the school doesn't have the resources, and it's so much work to design a whole curriculum. I would like restructuring to help with something like that.

Helen attributed the alienation and low achievement of African Americans in part to the Eurocentrism of both curriculum and instruction at Franklin. Her analysis might have sparked a deeper discussion of these issues. Gently critiquing her colleagues, she said:

> ...Some students may use dialect. If a teacher doesn't understand the student, that student may not do well. We have to know when and how to correct students so as not to damage their self-esteem. Teachers need to be able to relate to each culture. They need to understand why a child rolls his eyes. Why a child responds to directions differently. They need to understand the various cultures....

Marginal Voices in Restructuring

Despite their interest in restructuring and their potential contributions to the reform agenda, the voices of these teachers were silenced, their practices discounted, initiatives stifled, and their potential leadership overlooked. Their marginalization is instructive of the dominant ideologies and relations of power which help shape the context within which the dynamics of educational change are played out.

Paulette was initially excited about restructuring. But she gradually became distanced

from the life of her team and frustrated with restructuring due to a combination of factors: disenchantment with the team's superficial agenda, her transfer\demotion from Study and Research Methods to reading at mid-semester, and most important, lack of support from her colleagues and the principal. The process of her marginalization demonstrates how the voices of less powerful teachers, particularly teachers of color in white-dominated schools, may be muffled in spite of collaborative structures and "teacher empowerment".[9]

A pivotal event that distanced her from the team occurred mid-year when a prominent white parent complained to the administration about Paulette's SRM class. In a team meeting the other teachers said they were "pulling for her", but no one was willing to go with her to a parent conference. One teacher explained that she played tennis at the same club as the parent and "didn't want to get involved." This was a turning point in Paulette's commitment to the team. "The whole team should have been there, but they didn't back me up. So I knew teaming wasn't really about anything. After that I lost interest." She had welcomed the teams as an opportunity for teachers to pool their knowledge about students. But early on she became frustrated as others did not utilize the opportunity to re-examine their views about students like Raymond. When, as a result of a midyear reorganization, Paulette was transferred from Study and Research Methods to reading classes, this undercut whatever pedagogical authority and voice she had in her team. She said, "...We need to develop students' strengths but they [other team teachers] don't listen to the reading teachers. I've just stopped trying. They don't listen to me."

When she returned from her visit to an innovative school, she received very little support from the principal to disseminate what she had learned. She was not a team leader

and not part of the inner circle of teachers, and no one in the administration seemed to see her visit to an innovative school as legitimately related to restructuring. Then a district multicultural education project offered her a $500 scholarship to attend a summer institute in the Caribbean, with the stipulation that she pay an equal amount. The restructuring project was spending thousands of dollars for staff development; teachers were being sent to conferences across the U.S. and even Canada. However, she got no support from the school or district administration for her initiative:

> It's all on my back. I talked to [the principal] and the next day he told me he tried but no luck. He suggested I organize a dance to raise money. I wrote a letter to the school district, called twice. I'm making sacrifices but I would be able to bring it back to the school. I could be a leader in the whole school but they don't see that.

Samuel also was not chosen to be a team leader, despite his exemplary practice and leading role in many projects at Franklin. In a culture that suppressed disagreements and silenced talk about race, Samuel's open advocacy of African American students and his public sponsorship of African American culturally centered activities isolated him, even from some African American teachers, and placed him outside the bounds of leadership. When he proposed that the African American teachers organize a potluck dinner, his African American colleagues backed away for fear of reprisals from the school or district administration for being separatist or "too Black." Without validation from the administration or the district leadership, he was often dismissed as eccentric by other teachers. Pessimistic about the potential for change, he simply used the staff development activities associated with restructuring as an opportunity to improve his own teaching.

In contrast, formally, Helen was very much at the center of the reforms taking place

at Franklin. Recognized as an excellent and experienced teacher, she was selected as a team leader and frequently represented the school in district workshops on restructuring. She did set a tone for her team, encouraging her colleagues to examine their own actions when student behavior problems occurred. As an exemplar of pedagogical excellence, however, she was nearly as peripheral as Paulette and Samuel. For the most part, her knowledge was not incorporated into discussions of educational change. Her pedagogical excellence was devalued as somehow innate and intangible, the result of a unique talent, and therefore not replicable, rather than a set of perhaps elusive but nevertheless identifiable values, relationships, and beliefs about students (cf. Foster, 1991). One teacher described Helen as "one in a million." Franklin's principal said, "She's special. I don't think anyone can do what she can with kids." In this sense, Helen's pedagogical wisdom was as marginal in the discourse on school change as Paulette's and Samuel's. Thus, although Helen was active in restructuring, her potential contribution to substantively changing the educational experiences of low-achieving African American students was unrealized. Also, she was reluctant to make public her critique of Franklin's Eurocentrism because the topic was too politically charged.

An Impoverished Dialogue

Two to three years into reform (at Gates and Franklin, respectively), and at the end of the first year of "whole school restructuring," there was little substantive examination of beliefs, practices, and policies, particularly as related to African American students. Deficit explanations persisted and, in some instances, were reinforced by new opportunities for teachers to trade stories about students' backgrounds and "bad" behavior. With the reorganization into teams, teachers tended to accept extended responsibility for students'

welfare. However, their initiatives primarily focused on mitigating individual students' social problems rather than examining institutional practices and ideologies which spawned the school failure of African Americans *as a group*. The focus on improving social relations and school membership tended to foster a dual standard of success: improved social behaviors for the "at-risk" students and academic excellence for high achievers. This was a significant new manifestation of low-expectations and deficit models for African American students. (For a detailed discussion of this finding see Lipman, 1993.) This was especially so at Gates where the low academic track and "at-risk" status converged. But even at Franklin, teachers' empathy with students' personal situations led to elevating behavioral goals above academic success. This approach was reinforced by the ideology of the restructuring project itself which emphasized improving social relations and school membership through teams. The principal strategy to improve achievement, particularly at Gates, was the invention of new extrinsic rewards (parties, contests, prizes, awards). Because educators did not address root causes of low-achievement, the inevitable inability of many students to succeed in these contests, and their resistance to them, simply further displayed their school failure and marginality.[10]

Restructuring at Gates and Franklin reflected a paradox. On the one hand, both schools were challenged to transform the educational experiences and outcomes of African American students. Teachers, administrators, district restructuring leaders, and outside consultants concentrated energies on this goal. On the other hand, teachers known for their success with low-achieving and alienated students had little influence on the pathways to this goal. While educators attempted to invent new ways to support African American students,

leading examples within their schools were largely extraneous to the process. The perspectives, pedagogical wisdom, and exemplary practice of Paulette, Samuel, Helen, and others like them were not built upon.

A premise of restructuring--often reiterated by teachers, administrators, and district restructuring leaders--was that professional collaboration would promote an exchange of ideas that would lead to improvements in teaching. Especially among Gates and Franklin's multiracial teaching staffs, on-going dialogue and collaboration might have been expected to provoke reflection on practices and policies that marginalized African American students. But the content of team meetings, conversations, and cooperative planning suggested that teachers were not headed toward substantive re-examination of the normative ideologies and daily regularities in their schools. Issues such as the misinterpretation of African American cultural styles, low expectations, academic tracking and a dumbed-down curriculum for regular track students, purely extrinsic motivational rewards, a punitive climate, deficit notions of "at risk" students, disconnection from students' culture and family, the failure to relate curriculum to diverse students' experiences, individualistic competitiveness vs. group orientation--issues at the core of African American school experiences (Irvine, 1991)--were not touched upon.

Although new structures were created to promote shared learning and collective problem solving among the school staff, and although a central objective was to improve the education of "at risk" students, the reforms did not touch many of the ways in which African American students were subordinated. Fundamentally, it was this reality that the three teachers described here understood and addressed. Their pedagogies stood as a counter to

many of the normative practices which appeared to marginalize many African American students. Yet their expertise was not treated as a significant knowledge base from which to begin a re-examination of beliefs and practices. Furthermore, it can be argued that their concern for the whole child, their values undergirding curriculum, their linkage of academics to the student's life was valuable for all students, as a number of white students confirmed.[11]

I want to argue that the failure to draw upon the rich cultural knowledge and perspectives of exemplary teachers of African American students impoverished the restructuring agenda. In the context of the existing faculty of the two schools, Paulette, Samuel, Helen, and other culturally relevant teachers were potentially agents of school-wide change. Although we can only speculate about what might have happened had these teachers played a central role, they clearly offered educational vision and actual practice that posed a sharp alternative to the direction in which restructuring was evolving.

Devaluing the Leadership of Exemplary Teachers

Although theoretically all teachers had a greater say through their teams and steering committees, in fact not all were heard equally. Analysis of the marginalization of Paulette, Samuel, and Helen within the restructuring process is beyond the scope of this paper (see Lipman, 1993, for an extensive discussion of this issue). However, I have suggested some causes which have implications for restructuring more broadly. First, relations of power within and outside schools mediated dialogue and change (cf. Muncey & McQuillan, 1992; Sarason, 1990). Gates' traditional academic culture, its predominantly white faculty, and the subordination of African American staff, students, and parents produced a disempowering political and cultural environment for committed, culturally relevant teachers, particularly if

they were Black. Without outside support, the limited influence of teachers like Paulette was highly predictable. Untracking in the Study and Research Methods class, which Paulette taught, was dropped as a result of pressure on the school board by prominent white families who felt that the education of their honors-track children was debased by heterogeneous grouping. Paulette and other African American SRM teachers were reassigned to remedial reading, pushing them to the periphery of core subject teams. In any case, African American teachers at Gates were never part of the inner circle who had the principal's ear. At Franklin, clearly excellent--but outspoken--teachers such as Samuel were denied leadership positions for fear they would "rock the boat" and bring pressures on a school which already had a negative image in the district.

Second, in both schools, discussion of racial issues was taboo. Culturally centered, African American voices were stifled by a school culture that covered profound ideological and racial schisms with a facade of harmony. Outspoken advocates of African American students, such as Samuel, were outliers in this context. Third, there was a pervasive belief among teachers and administrators that many African American students were culturally and socially deficient. This belief was neither challenged by school leaders nor penetrated by the empirical evidence of student success in Paulette, Samuel, and Helen's classes. Helen's experience suggested that successful teaching with these students was illusive, idiosyncratic, not knowable or replicable. Even Paulette's rapport with "difficult" or "disruptive" African American students was attributed to the fact that she was African American without exploring the specific content of her pedagogy. Moreover, no school or district leader openly acknowledged the *pedagogical* knowledge and leadership of successful teachers of African

American students. The devaluation of this expertise is not specific to this setting (Foster, 1994). Until recently, the pedagogical knowledge and perspective of teachers of color has been largely unexplored by educational research (Foster, 1991), and it has been omitted from the academic discourse of teacher education (Murrell, 1991).

Conclusion

There are several conclusions from this study which have implications for restructuring generally. First, the Riverton experience demonstrates that dialogue among teachers is mediated by relations of power within and outside schools (see Muncey & McQuillan, 1992, for a related discussion of the influence of faculty politics). Although theoretically all teachers had a greater voice through their teams and steering committees, in fact not all were heard equally. At Gates a core of veteran, honors track teachers supported by white parents were a reigning power group. Outspoken African American teachers were peripheral. Restructuring was also mediated by the existing configuration of power within the community. This was demonstrated when a politically powerful group of Gates parents and their allies on the Board of Education scuttled a new, heterogeneously grouped class.

Second, restructuring was shaped significantly by teachers' ideologies. Deficit explanations for the low-achievement of African American children were dominant. In this ideological context, the success of teachers whose practice argued against deficit models was seen as idiosyncratic. Also, the pervasive taboo against discussion of racial issues mitigated against teachers who supported African American centered activities, advocated explicitly for African American students, or constructed the situation of African American students as a group phenomenon. As a result, advocates of African American students, like Samuel and

Paulette, were silenced in ways both subtle and overt--kept from leadership positions, ostracized, unsupported in their initiatives, and kept in check by an undercurrent of maintaining the status quo in race relations.

Third, and most central to this paper, given the growing diversity of students in U.S. schools, restructuring will be limited if schools do not find ways to capitalize on the knowledge of culturally relevant teachers. Several scholars of color have pointed to the need to bring the wisdom of exemplary teachers of students of color into pre-service teacher preparation (King, 1991; Delpit, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1991; Foster, 1991) and to include the knowledge and sensibilities of people of color as part of the academic discourse of teacher education programs (Murrell, 1991). Delpit (1988: 296) argues:

> I am also suggesting that appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture. Black parents, teachers of color, and members of poor communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion of what kind of instruction is in their children's best interest....Educators must open themselves to, and allow themselves to be affected by, these alternative voices.

Building on this perspective, I want to argue that exemplary teachers of students of color have a crucial role to play in the dialogue and practice related to school restructuring. The teachers discussed here were among the few at their schools with the ideological basis, the cultural knowledge, and the pedagogical orientation to offer a sharp alternative to dominant beliefs and practices regarding African American students. This was a crucial, missing component of restructuring and one that is largely absent from restructuring frameworks (Murphy, 1991). For example, King (1991) argues that restructuring does not address the underlying causes of the crisis in Black education which include the alienation of Black students from the educational process. This is where culturally relevant teachers, such

as those described here, can begin to set a direction, serve as models, and take a leading role as mentors and master teachers through pre- and in-service professional development where other teachers can be exposed to their thinking and practice (Delpit (1992b).

Ways must be found to sponsor, as exemplars, effective teachers of students of color and to ensure that these teachers have a significant voice in conversations about school change. Restructuring at Gates and Franklin illustrates that this role requires public recognition and support. Further research might illuminate the conditions under which exemplary teachers of students of color are enabled to play pro-active roles in school change.

Finally, the direction of restructuring at Gates and Franklin suggests that reformers may be overly sanguine in the expectation that collaborative inquiry and dialogues of change will lead to new directions in practice and to a more positive orientation toward oppressed minority students. One significant challenge is helping teachers begin to develop critical consciousness of the conditions which disempower students of color and of their own role in transforming this process. (See King, 1991; Murrell, 1991 for some example of how this might occur.) Moreover, school systems as well as schools of education face the complicated challenge of helping teachers who are not culturally connected with children of color and their communities to realize the culturally centered pedagogy and "connectedness" personified in the teachers described in this paper, (see Foster, 1994).

Given existing relations of power within schools and the influence of teachers' ideologies on the direction of reform, fundamental reform may require the mobilization of parents and communities of color. As Foster (1991: 304) warns:

> Researchers, policy makers, educators, and parents concerned with improving the education of poor minority students ought to be skeptical about reforms that

> disregard the perspectives of those very communities whose children already constitute a majority in 25 of the nation's largest cities.

If children of color are to benefit, the views of these communities need to be heard. And school leaders committed to an empowering education for all students may confront the difficult challenge of forging a new, public consensus around this goal. Authorizing a special role for teachers who are culturally connected with, and advocates for, children of color, is an aspect of ensuring that communities of color have an authentic voice in the direction of their children's education.

Notes

[1]All proper names and places are pseudonyms.

[2]According to some teachers and administrators, silence about race was bolstered by the fear that public discussion of the marginal status of African Americans might evoke a controversy which would prompt white parents to withdraw their children from the public schools.

[3]The *at risk* label suggests deficits and tends to blame school problems on personal or social deficiencies. I use *at risk* when quoting others or reflecting their point of view.

[4]Changes associated with restructuring included:

- interdisciplinary, grade-level teaching teams with broad collective responsibility for a common group of students
- school steering committees composed of teachers, administrators, non-teaching staff
- teacher initiated collaborative ventures
- flexible scheduling of classes
- teachers accessing social services for students
- two common planning periods daily for teaching teams
- a new, heterogeneously grouped higher order thinking class
- integration of special education students and teachers into regular classes

[5]Although successful teachers of students of color need not be persons of color (e.g., see Ladson-Billings 1992b study of nine culturally relevant teachers of African American students, for example), the three teachers I discuss are all African Americans.

[6]*Pedagogy* is used broadly to refer to social relationships; conceptions of knowledge; and beliefs about the role of teacher, teaching, and possibilities of students.

[7]In her study of successful teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1992a; 1992b; 1991; 1990a 1990b; Ladson-Billings & Henry 1990) develops a typology of characteristics along three dimensions:

1. Conceptions of self/other: Teachers reflect commitment to, belief in, and valuing of black students. They see themselves as part of the community, and see teaching as giving back to the community; they encourage students to do the same and to see connections between their community, national, ethnic, and global identities. They see teaching as "pulling knowledge out of students", recognizing their abilities and richness of cultural background.

2. Social relations: Teachers demonstrate a connectedness with all students and extend their relationships with students beyond the classroom into the community. They encourage "a community of learners" within the classroom. Their relations with students are humane and equitable.

3. Conceptions of knowledge: Teachers are passionate about content. They understand the political nature of school knowledge and challenge the curriculum as students do. They help build bridges between what students know and what they need to learn. Excellence is complex, involving both standards of the broader society and students' ways of knowing.

[8]Foster (1991) characterizes these teachers as (paraphrased here):

- Holding high academic and behavioral standards and helping students meet them.

- Building on the history and social realities of students' communities and the lessons of the past to help African American students persist and confront racism.

[9]This is reminiscent of studies of "status equalization, in which students of color have formal equality but race operates as a "diffuse status characteristic" creating expectations that whites are more competent and students of color are rendered invisible (Cohen, 1975).]

[10]For a full presentation of these findings see Lipman, P. (1993).

[11]Jacob, an 18 year old white student who had been expelled from Franklin in the eighth grade, occasionally returned to visit Samuel. This interview segment illustrates that Samuel's pedagogy benefitted white students as well as African Americans.

PL: Did you like school?
Jacob: Some of it.
PL: What did you like?
Jacob: English. Mr. Thompson. He let you do things. The rest of it was boring. I like science, the lab. Most kids like labs; they like to do things. When you get to get up and move around, when you get up and do more things in class it's more interesting. When the teacher is just sitting behind his desk talking to kids all day, the kids are going to ignore him. I do. I just ignore 'em.
PL: Why was Mr. Thompson different?
Jacob: He let us do different things. And he was the only one who told us that what we were learning was important in life. He'd tell us how it might not seem like it now, but we'd need this stuff later. I come by and see him all the time. I respect him for what he taught me.

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